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FOREWORD

A major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate inservice growth and school improvement. Consequently, requirements include not only meeting the standards of the Utah State Office of Education, but also completing a school evaluation every six years.

School evaluation is that effort by the local school staff to take a comprehensive look at the school's program, operation, and effect. The school determines how closely its purposes and philosophy coincide with its actual practices and the degree to which its stated objectives are being reached. It is a three-phased program: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, March 6, 2003, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to meet the requirements referred to above.

The entire staff of the Academy at Cedar Mountain is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Wanda "Jodi" Tuttle is commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for the generally fine program being provided for the Academy at Cedar Mountain students, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more adequately meet the needs of the students of the Academy at Cedar Mountain.

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THE ACADEMY AT CEDAR MOUNTAIN

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Bruce Hughes.....Member
Thomas Hughes.....Member

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Wanda “Jodi” Tuttle, M.Ed.....Head of School
Charlie Smith..... Administrative Assistant
Barbara Davis..... Admission Coordinator

Counseling Faculty

Kathy Allen	Jason Kartchner	James Richwine
Susie Chandler	Pyper Long	Sunny Robinson
Dave Eynon	Megan Munson	Brian Smith
Levi Jones	Nathan Player	Beth Snoddy

Support Staff

Alyse Clements, Nurse	Jessica Littlefield, Cook
Cindy Hughes, Head Cook	Dawn Sandors, Cook
Mark Leonard, Consultant Liaison	Cameron Tea, Student Life Mentor

Faculty

Kaleen Covington, English, Drama	Mitchell Littlefield, PE, Spanish
Tracy Davis, Social Studies	Kelly Pugh, Art
Andrew Israel, Science	Leslie Roberts, Mathematics

THE ACADEMY AT CEDAR MOUNTAIN

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of The Academy at Cedar Mountain is to provide a strong foundation that will help our students develop a sense of identity, establish a healthy set of personal values, and become confident, self-directed, lifelong learners.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

1. All students can learn.
2. Students need to not only demonstrate their understanding of essential knowledge and skills, but also need to be actively involved in solving problems and producing quality work.
3. A student's self esteem is enhanced by positive relationships and mutual respect among and between students, faculty, and staff.
4. Students learn in different ways and should be provided with a variety of instructional and assessment approaches to support their learning.
5. Cultural consciousness can increase students' understanding of different peoples and cultures.
6. Individual students can develop emotional maturity through working together in support of a successful school community.
7. A safe and physically comfortable environment promotes learning and creativity.
8. Students learn to make appropriate decisions with accountability given a supportive and challenging learning environment.
9. Each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs.
10. Students learn best when they have appropriate opportunities for success.
11. Students' ability to use technology advances their learning experience and potential.

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Dr. Ralph Vander Heide, Accreditation Consultant, Visiting Team Chairperson

Heidi Mock, Intermountain Consulting and Educational Services

Judith Vander Heide, Accreditation Consultant

ACADEMY AT CEDAR MOUNTAIN
REPORT OF NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND OF
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (NASCU)/STATE OF UTAH
ACCREDITATION RESPONSE TEAM

CHAPTER 1:

**INTRODUCTION DESCRIBING THE PURPOSE OF THE VISIT, THE SELF-
IMPROVEMENT PLAN, CHARACTERISTICS ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND
OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

A team of three educators visited the Academy at Cedar Mountain, a special purpose school, on March 6, 2003, to complete a site evaluation as part of the requirements for accreditation by the Northwest Association of Schools and of Colleges and Universities (NASCU) and the state of Utah.

The team held a short morning meeting with the director (“head”) of the school, and then had a breakfast meeting with students, teachers and administrators. Following breakfast the team participated in the “morning meeting” for this day. (“Morning meeting” is held every day.) A student conducted the meeting in which announcements were made, issues of concern discussed, etc. This meeting set the tone for the day. Students and teachers proceeded to classes following the 45 minute (longer than usual) meeting, and members of the Visiting Team visited classes and continued to speak with administrators, students and teachers. Individual team members frequently consulted with the director of the school. A debriefing was held in the afternoon with the director and one member of the board of directors.

The Academy at Cedar Mountain has a current total enrollment of 18 students, 15 are in residence in at the school in Cedar City, Utah; three are participating in a “wilderness program.”

There are five teachers at Academy at Cedar Mountain. Extra-curricular programs are also offered.

The school was founded in January 2000 with six students. The school’s self-study explains that it is “an independent boarding high school with students from through the United States.” The school is “dedicated to improving the social, emotional, physical, and educational growth of the student,” and seeks to make the educational program unique through its “emphasis on essential skills that students need to succeed in life beyond the school: good communication, personal organization and leadership development.” The aim is to build in combination with the school’s differentiated curriculum “a foundation of self-confidence and achievement.”

Most students who attend Academy at Cedar Mountain have been unsuccessful in other schools for reasons such as drug and/or alcohol problems, family problems (including living in a “non-traditional family”), or learning disabilities.

In conducting its self-study the school used as primary sources of guidance *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance*, published by the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) and *Collaborating for Student Achievement*, the handbook of the State of Utah. Focus groups and a “School Improvement Team” were formed to carry out the various tasks and to go through the suggested steps leading to school self-analysis and ultimately improvement. After defining beliefs and mission, two major desired results for student learning (DRSLs) were established. Next the school’s organizational and instructional effectiveness were analyzed, and five action plans for improvement based on the DRSLs as well as “school environment and support for teacher” were put into place. A report on the implementation of the plan and documentation of results is to be completed by August 20, 2004

CHAPTER 2:

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESPONSE TEAM’S PERSPECTIVE AS TO THE WORK OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL IN ADDRESSING EACH ASPECT OF THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

The School Profile

The profile of Academy at Cedar Mountain adequately portrays the school population, environment, curriculum and other relevant information about the school with emphasis on its mission, philosophy and educational direction.

The self-study indicates that the school profile “provides an overview of student performance data, student and community demographic data, school characteristics, and stakeholder perspectives on the quality of education.”

A variety of tests are used to determine student achievement and potential. NSSE surveys were used to determine stakeholder perspectives on the quality of education. The school has analyzed the surveys in order to improve.

It is noted in the self-study that the areas of most concern to all stakeholders are the availability of resources to students and the learning environment. Communication of the progress of students by teachers to parents is another concern indicated through the surveys. The surveys of teachers indicate that the major academic issues deal with critical thinking, responsible behavior, and problem solving.

Academy at Cedar Mountain accomplished the following four major tasks recommended by NSSE:

- Utilized a systematic process for collecting and managing the profile data.
- Analyzed and synthesized the data.
- Communicated the data.

Used (and is using) the data for school improvement planning.

The Visiting Team suggests that the school could perhaps in future profiling more broadly disaggregate analysis of the data. Ethnicity, gender, grade levels, special programs, students' backgrounds, and much more could be included. The Visiting Team notes that the data has indeed been unpacked; the team is only suggesting that perhaps even more disaggregation could take place, especially as the process of data collection continues. The purpose of the self-study process is to maximize student learning which is to a great extent effected through much collection of data and the unpacking and analyzing of that data.

Beliefs and Mission Statement

Beliefs

The school has collaboratively established 11 beliefs. All are appropriate and aligned with the major purposes of Academy at Cedar Mountain. Four salient beliefs are the following:

All students can learn.

Students learn in different ways.

Student's ability to use technology advances their learning experience and potential.

A student's self esteem is enhanced by positive relationships and mutual respect.

The Visiting Team finds the beliefs to be excellent. However, it is suggested that the beliefs be revisited in order to possibly combine some of them.

The beliefs are clearly stated and free of jargon. All stakeholders can easily understand them. It appears that the implications of the belief statements and the level of the school's conviction to acting upon the beliefs have been fully considered prior to finalizing the list. The Visiting Team believes that stakeholders are willing to make a commitment to the direction indicated by these beliefs.

The mission statement

The mission statement follows:

The mission of The Academy at Cedar Mountain is to provide a strong foundation that will help our students develop a sense of identity, establish a healthy set of personal values, and become confident, self-directed, lifelong learners.

The Visiting Team finds that the mission statement is concise yet sufficiently comprehensive to reflect a collective vision that focuses on the role the school must assume in shaping the future. It should motivate and inspire as well as to give clear purpose and direction to the school. Lifelong learning and developing personal values are

top priorities. It is aligned with the school's belief statements.

Desired Results for Student Learning

The School Improvement Team at Academy at Cedar Mountain determined that the school should work on two DRSL's that are aligned and consistent with the beliefs and mission statement. The first deals with thinking and reasoning skills, and the second deals with personal and social responsibility. The self-study gives indicators of student achievement for each DRSL.

The Visiting Team finds that a consensus-building process has been established for defining the DRSL's that involves primarily teachers and administrators. However, it appears that recommendations and suggestions from students were somewhat taken into account for defining the DRSL;s. The Visiting Team recognizes that it is difficult to include input from students because most stay at the school for a relatively short period of time (not more than one year). However, the team encourages Academy at Cedar Mountain to make greater effort to include representation of students and their views. No students are listed as members of the school improvement team.

The DRSL's cross all discipline content areas. They are research based and data driven. Furthermore, they focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Most importantly they provide a foundation for improvement.

Analysis of the Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness

The school's self-study states: "Through the analysis of this section, a better understanding of the strengths and limitations of the Academy at Cedar Mountain has been reached."

The Visiting Team finds that Academy at Cedar Mountain to some extent conducted an analysis of the school's organizational and instructional effectiveness based on research-based principles of high performing systems of teaching and learning. A strong effort was made that produced for the school satisfactory results.

It is recommended that in future analysis of I and O effectiveness that the school include greater examination of the extent to which the key dimensions of the school's instructional practices are congruent with each other, e.g., the alignment of the instructional practices and assessments with the curriculum. It should be noted that the Visiting Team finds the school to be working on this. The school is reminded that assessment should be varied and include standardized tests as well as so-called "pencil and paper tests" created by teachers, tests that accompany textbooks, cooperative learning, inquiry methods, group discussions, concept development, simulations, portfolios, student created tests, and other means of assessment.

The school is commended for having already launched into ways to improve weaknesses (limitations) that were revealed through the analysis of I and O effectiveness.

Analysis of the Action Plans

The school has five “action plans” in its “school improvement plan.” Three are directly related to the DRSL’s and two treat what the self-study terms “school environment and support for teachers,” which is defined as “desired results for school environment.” One deals with “community building” and the other with “ leadership for school improvement.” A timeline is given for accomplishment of the goals of each of the plans. Specific action steps are indicated, and the person(s) responsible for monitoring the progress of each plan is given.

Working on five action plans appears to be excessively ambitious. However, the self-study explains the ambition as follows: “While five seems too many to give equal time and focus, our action plan was designed to integrate areas. We also believe that continued work on the action plan from last year is necessary, so the target area on that plan has remained in this one. Also, without the direct attention to the environment, the students will have difficulty thriving.”

The Visiting Team understands the desire to work on all five plans. However, the school is reminded and cautioned that all 14 “action steps” of the plans are to be accomplished by August of 2004. Perhaps these common deadlines should be further considered and some extended.

Certainly the selection of goals (plans) for school improvement is based on the school’s priorities for improving student learning and for improving the instructional and organizational effectiveness of the school. It seems that the five plans and 14 action steps are aligned with the school’s profile, beliefs and mission, DRSL’s , and the analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness. Already all school staff members are implementing the school improvement plan. Academy at Cedar Mountain is advised to encourage all non-teaching stakeholders to share periodically their perspectives about the school’s progress on the overall plan.

CHAPTER 3:

THE SCHOOL’S ADHERENCE TO THE NASCU *STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION*, THE STATE OF UTAH *CORE CURRICULUM* AND THE UTAH *LIFE SKILLS*

The Academy at Cedar Mountain, with minor deviations, meets the ten standards of the Northwest Association of Schools and of Colleges and Universities (NASCU). One deviation occurs in standard II-Student Personnel Services. Presently the school has no certified guidance counselor. However, plans are in place to secure the services of a counselor. A second deviation occurs in standard IV-library Media Program. The school has noted deficiencies and is working on improvement.

The school meets the requirements of the State Core Curriculum. It is not clear to what extent school personnel understand the seven *Utah Life Skills*. However, the Visiting Team noted that aspects of those skills were incorporated into the curriculum, especially those dealing with character development, self-improvement, and life-long learning.

All school personnel were conversant with the school's DRLS's. All had worked on developing those DRLS's.

CHAPTER 4:

GENERAL COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations include but are not limited to the following:

- All teachers and other affected constituents are aware of the self-improvement plan, the action steps and timelines.
- All school personnel have been involved in the self-study work (also see recommendations).
- Academy at Cedar Mountain is highly commended for the Training Institute for Emotional Growth Education (TIEGE) program that is currently being taught to students. This program through teaching "emotional leadership skills" is directly related to the beliefs and mission of the school.
- The school is highly commended for being forthright and honest in its self-appraisal. It appears that personnel understand that the self-study process is a Socratic instruction piece that embodies the democratic style of teaching and learning through questions and answers. Academy at Cedar Mountain seems to be in the process of institutionalizing the method of reflective inquiry for the maintenance of high standards.
- The courteous treatment of the Visiting Team and hospitality are greatly appreciated.
- School personnel evidence positive attitudes and appear to truly respect students.
- The encouragement of education in the arts and self-expression (jazz, drama, public speaking, etc.) should be most helpful to these types of students
- The use of consultants for specialty programs should address several needs of the students.
- Students participate in meaningful, worthwhile field trips.
- All students have laptop computers (also see recommendations).

- The community service work performed by students is a most positive aspect of the holistic program at Academy at Cedar Mountain.
- All personnel who worked on the self-study are highly commended for compiling an excellent study that followed closely the guidelines of NSSE.

Recommendations:

- Consider revisiting the timelines for accomplishment of the improvement plan. School personnel should not feel pressured to accomplish all of the 14 action steps within 16 months.
- The school needs a consultant in special education. (The Visiting Team understands that a consultant has already been consulted for possible employment.)
- Greater involvement of students in the self-study process is encouraged.
- A better system for tracking the progress of students should be put into place, aligned with the mission of the school. This includes tracking students after they leave the program. It also includes improving pre and post testing.
- As recognized by the school, the library/media facilities need improvement. This includes incorporating better use of the Internet and computers. Students are required to have laptops; they could be more fully utilized.
- More input from all stakeholders is needed not just school personnel.
- The Visiting Team strongly urges that a dress code be established. It appears that presently too much energy is expended and time wasted in arguing about appropriate dress with certain students.